Hope as Church joins fight against plastic waste

The Daily Monitor

December 10, 2025 Wednesday

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TRUTH EVERYDAY
Daily Monitor

Length: 1457 words

Body

What you need to know:

- Addressing plastic waste is a moral imperative and a necessary part of a holistic approach to protecting both creation and human dignity.

There is a general public outcry about plastic pollution, particularly caused by poor disposal of single-use plastic bags commonly known as Kaveera and bottles.

Single use plastics have certainly simplified peoples ways of life. However, overuse, over production, poor disposal and inefficient waste management systems have raised serious threats to human safety, environmental security and ecosystem integrity.

This is the message Catholic Church leaders advocating for good environment management practices revealed during the season of creation symposium 2025 organised by Laudato SI Center Comboni Uganda in Collaboration with Kampala Archdiocese.

Background

Laudato Si focus on plastic waste management is rooted in Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, which frames the ecological crisis as an issue of integral ecology, connecting environmental degradation and social injustice.

The encyclical argues that a throwaway culture driven by unchecked pre occupied society activities is a root cause of problems like plastic pollution and calls for a global ecological conversion to change lifestyles, models of production and consumption and the established structures of power.

Therefore, addressing plastic waste is a moral imperative and a necessary part of a holistic approach to protecting both creation and human dignity.

This is part of the reason Ladato Si Center Comboni Uganda was established not only to address the environmental management aspect but its climate change effects as a whole.

The Centre is a Catholic founded organisation dedicated to environmental protection and sustainable development managed by Comboni Missionaries who draw their inspiration from Pope Francis' Encyclical letter Ladato Si; On the care of Our home.

The team also draws their inspiration from the general Chapter of the Comboni Missionaries which calls for everyone to embrace integral ecology as a vital dimension of our mission to hear and respond to the cry of the earth and the poor.

This year's symposium is organised under the theme "peace with creation; promoting sustainable policies and practices in plastic waste disposal in Uganda"

Action points

The Director Laudato Si Centre Rev Fr Kennedy Onoba pointed out that there are several stakeholders raising awareness about environmental degradation and pollution caused by plastic waste among other factors and his team has joined the effort for purposes of making environmental peace to mother earth.

Laudato SI Centre Comboni Uganda is promoting sustainable policies in plastic waste management and this must remind humanity that they are all part of creation which must be protected jealously.

In the face of climate crisis this calls for protection of the environment especially when the world is seeing drastic weather changes.

He notes that the plastic pollution is littering the environment everywhere including Kampala city.

It is the reason why his team is carrying out education, sensitization and advocacy through raising environmental consciousness at all levels and advocating for policies that protect creation and promoting climate adaptation and resilience through grass root engagement.

He noted that at the beginning of this year's season of creation during the Raising Hope conference in Rome, Pope Leo XIV reminded the world in his address titled "What Remains for Laudato Si that God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world he created".

The Pope tasked us to answer the question what we will say for our brothers and sisters in the future generation if we actually destroy Gods creation.

Since Pope Francis led the world a lasting legacy of ecological conversion and responsibility, it is the duty of humans to carry that legacy by protecting the environment.

Fr Kennedy notes that his team has prepared policy briefs which is to be handed to the responsible government authorities for implementation.

It includes among others reasonable taxes to be levied on industries that are manufacturing alternative products to curb plastic pollution such as glass water bottles.

This is because apparently a glass bottled water goes for Shs3, 000 yet plastic bottled ones are at Shs500-Shs1, 000

The team is working closely with Schools in Luwero where St Daniel Combine Primary School has already banned anything packed in plastics to be sold in the school canteen and other schools in Kampala and Gulu Arch Diocese are to follow suit.

Plastic waste as a challenge to the ecology, action points

The Secretary to the Nuncio Rev Fr Georges Kwami Kouwonou highlighting the dangers and challenges caused by plastic waste notes that plastic waste harms the ecology by damaging ecosystems through the ingestion and entanglement of wildlife, contaminating soil and water and contributing to air pollution.

Animals often mistake plastic for food, leading to starvation and digestive issues, while plastic debris creates habitat destruction and physical harm.

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Over time, plastics break down into microplastics and release toxic chemicals, contaminating soil and water sources and impacting plant growth, biodiversity and the food chain.

Giving the statistics he noted that our common home is faced with global warming and environmental disaster with over 60 million people displaced globally due to environmental disaster.

In Uganda about 600 tons of waste is generated daily, the water for agriculture is contaminated with plastic waste and humans are polluting the air and water by throwing plastics to litter the water surface and ground. This to him means we cannot be at peace with nature.

This therefore calls us to adopt the practice of reuse, recycle and reduce plastic waste

The Pastoral coordinator of Kampala Archdiocese Rev Fr Ambrose Bwangatto in his key note address highlighted that the month of October is for humans to observe the season of creation

This calls for adoption of practices that can save the environment and this includes desisting from use of plastics and have the culture of disposing them in collection points.

Already two meetings have been held in relation to environmental protection in regard to plastic usage and the Church leaders resolved that water must be bottled in glass bottles henceforth.

They also urge Ugandans to carry none plastic water bottles along with them wherever they go to avoid purchasing water in plastic bottles and dumping them anywhere.

Thirdly it is important to adopt the practice of availing water in work places and in large gathering in water dispensers using paper disposable cups.

Laudato Si Centre jointly with Kampala Arch Diocese is working closely with school children because it is easy to instil best practice culture of protecting the environment in them than adults who are not good listeners and practitioners.

Health dangers of Micro plastics

Dr Henry Tamale a consultant with Integrative Medicine Consultants explained that since plastics are littered all over the place they end breaking up into tiny pieces and once they get stuck in soils, it will affect plant roots or end up in the farm products which becomes dangerous to human health.

He highlights that single-use plastics are non-biodegradable, as they cannot be fully absorbed into the soil.

As a result of poor waste disposal, plastics end up in already inadequate and malfunctioned water drainage systems; hence causing water clogging and flooding on rainy days.

Single-use plastics undermine the integrity of ecosystems as they affect water infiltration and absorption and release minute quantities of plastics, which are detrimental to biodiversity and cause water contamination.

It is a known fact that human beings consume micro plastics every weak causing human health

Micro plastics have been found in human body including in the blood, saliva, liver, kidneys, lungs and placenta.

Micro plastics in the blood vessels have raised concerns, which include increased risk of heart attack, strokes, inflammation and blood clotting.

The chemicals in micro plastics have been linked to various health issues, including cancer, immune system damage, reproductive problems such as infertility and miscarriages as well as developmental delays.

Those found in river beds usually affect aquatic species that end of dying and those littered in the environment are health risk to animals.

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It is the reason everyone is called upon to participate in best management practices to avoid such challenges

Uganda falls in the category where there are laws against use of plastic bags, but implementation has remained a thorny issue.

This can be attributed to lack of political will and public awareness and unclear policy direction.

Load-Date: December 11, 2025

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